

Longing for More Time

Bridgit Stoffer

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By
Bridgit Stoffer
Master of Fine Arts

Herron School of Art and Design
IUPUI
Indiana University

Associate Professor Andrew Winship
Thesis Advisor
Director of Graduate Studies

Associate Professor William Potter
Committee Member

Associate Professor Stephanie Doty
Committee Member

Accepted: May 2014

Professor Valerie Eickmeier
Dean of Herron School of Art and Design

Date

Beginning the Process

Process embeds Meaning

If dysfunction didn't exist what would be the point of unconditional love?

*"We went searching. Moving in the dark without knowing what we were looking for, a fragmented reflection of our yesterdays. A collection of thoughts already washed away by the rain down the gutters to the sea."*ⁱ

My work explores how one negative act can generate determination and resolve. Through process and material exploration I've created ways that allow my image, much like an individual, to find a way to not simply endure, but navigate a path to thrive in grim environments. I'm interested in the way memory is fragmented, scattered and often unreliable, which is why photographs serve such an important part of my practice, all they can offer is a glimpse into the past. Rather than creating memories they often serve as a historical document of a single moment in time really giving no truthful insight into the past where they've been generated.

My drawings and installations intertwine creating visual poems that explore my reflections and understanding of the themes present in what I create focusing on: the impact and resilience on seen and unseen realities, trying to rebuild out of brokenness, and our longing to preserve something lost. The poetic nature of my work allows my audience to view my inner world through shared experiences and invites them to consider moments of honest vulnerability exposed in the quiet subtlety of what they witness. "It's the personal that makes the work universal," Andrew, my thesis advisor, said this to me over and over at the beginning, encouraging me not to let go of my personal narrative. That narrative is always my starting point, because it feels like the only one I can trust. Our present is constantly

informing our past and how we choose to interpret it, which is integral to my research and path I've chosen to focus on in my graduate studies.

I ground most of my ideas in psychology, understanding how family dynamics shift and change due to loss and how grief changes a family into a cluster of individuals rather than a solid support system.ⁱⁱ This understanding is what led me down the path I have sought from the beginning in my graduate work. I think of myself as a visual poet and the inspiration from my work comes from within rather than outside influences. It isn't until after the work is made where I consider its relation to theory and other artists. My decisions are based on my own thoughts and ideas and how I might best express them to my audience into a shared experience.

Beginning the Process of Making

I found an old journal that had one of my first artist statements in it and it said, "My work becomes a surrogate for the support system I need but doesn't exist in a way a family member should." This quote inspired me to question family dynamics and how I relate to my own family. I questioned whether I could create a family dynamic in an installation and decided this would be the focus of my work in my graduate studies. I spent half of my first semester swimming in a series of bad paintings, failed experiments and rotten ideas. I questioned why I was even admitted to grad school in the first place and felt sure soon I'd be found out for not having a single piece of work worth looking at or talking about and be dismissed as an MFA candidate. What was lacking was my personal narrative that allowed the viewer to see into my inner world to create that bond of a shared experience. I thought in graduate school I would work to distance my personal historicityⁱⁱⁱ in my

works' narratives. What I learned was that my personal story was my connection to the common human experience we all share together, and in that common experience I could speak to ideas about loss, perseverance, preservation and resilience in the ways I understood them as a way to communicate more honestly with my audience.

I realized I was questioning family dynamics without understanding the definition of what a family really was. As mine was in complete dysfunction, a sad array of addictions, abuse and neglect; these were the only memories I held of my childhood. I didn't have an identity in my family. It wasn't a living, breathing part of my life as it is with most families. For the majority of my life I existed outside of my family dynamic, always a visitor in my parents' homes with no real connection to what it meant to be a part of a family. I literally lived out of a suitcase traveling from home to home, either parent or relative accepting to give me a place to stay sometimes only for a night at a time. I had no place to call home. (See Figure 1) I realized that perhaps my necessity for this search to define a family dynamic was to finally come to terms with, and understand my own circumstances as a child. Much has



Figure 1
Searching for a Place to Call Home
Suitcase, Child Plaster Clothes

changed in my life since the days of my youth for the better. I have a strong connection to my father, being able to reach out to him for support and stability in a way I still find awkward at times because of its newness. I discussed with him the issues I was dealing with feeling like a failure in graduate school and making terrible work with goals about exploring family. The outcome of that conversation was something I never expected.



Figure 2
You Can See Me If You Look Close
Acrylic on Paper

A week later my father and stepmother visited me bringing a box of photographs from my childhood I didn't know existed. That box has completely changed my artistic practice and it gave me a personal dialogue to start the conversation necessary to share an experience with my audience.

In a matter of days I had complete body of work, completely new, completely different, entirely worthwhile. In my first weekend I created 15 new paintings, in my second week I had close to 30. I remember my thesis advisor commenting, "I wish this would have happened sooner than now, but you've changed leaps and bounds." It took a few more months for me to explain to him the reason for the sudden shift in my work. He was astounded that I had this profound connection to my past gifted to me and that I wasn't even discussing it. I didn't realize it was necessary, and it took some time to do so, but eventually realized it was crucial to the work I was doing

and the dialogue I was creating. In my work. I was physically retracing my photographs and my personal history together. My memories were constantly questioned and considered as I reflected on each new painting or drawing. The first body of work consisted of a series of pale glaze paintings on both paper and muslin titled *You Can See Me if You Look Close*. (See figure 2) They were faint, ghost-like, almost floating off the page and further into the series began hiding in the shadows of the fabric mistaken for stains. The figures were isolated and lost in a large amount of negative space, physically extracted from the environment I found them in.

Medium Embeds Meaning

I believe that form and content must work in sync with one another; that together they substantiate the full dialogue in the things that I create. In this way my material choices embed meaning in my work and strengthen the metaphor or poeticism in the works themselves. My material choices are thusly well considered before making an object for an installation, a color or type of paint for a painting and a specific pencil, paper quality and size, and eraser used in creating drawings, so that they make the dynamic I wish to create visible through its material qualities and limitations, its physical form and its visceral content. The coherency of these things working in unison is essential to create a successful visual poeticism I seek to fulfill in my work.

Paintings

I see a single, isolated figure approximately life size floating in a vast amount of negative space, anchored to the bottom of the painting. (See Figure 3) I want the empty, raw linen to feel overwhelming to emphasize the figure standing alone in an empty space, with nothing to define them or their surroundings. The image in the painting is soft, transparent and feels as if it is being absorbed into the surface. They are done on muslin linen, which has a transparent surface allowing light to reflect through the painting and illuminate the surface from within.

My paintings are barely on the surface as if they don't exist. I'm interested in how the paintings exist as a memory and feel like they are disappearing or fleeting. Thin layers of glaze



Figure 3; Longing to Belong
Acrylic on Muslin

build up the surface quality but leave the paintings faint and ghostly. The figures can be mistaken for shadows or stains on the fabric until the viewer gets close enough to see subtle details. (See Figure 4)

The paintings were my starting place, my way to delve into this past I did not yet recognize as my own. I searched and researched each painting looking for answers to questions long forgotten about my childhood. I wanted them absorbed

into the surface and disappearing like a fleeting memory because for me that's what they were. I didn't even recognize the images as my own; I'd refer to a particular piece as "that girl" or "that baby" rather than referring to myself in the image. It was as much a search for my identity in the image as it was important that they be shared and witnessed giving them importance even though barely recognizable.

After time dealing with the images I took on my ownership of the image and began searching for a way to express the memories that coincided with these historical documents that showed parts of my past, it led me to seek a way to share my own experience and get across a different meaning than that of fleeting memories. What I desired to speak to was the lost child or a child now protected who experienced the type of violence and destructive past that I knew as my own. I had to seek a new process of working to speak through the image, creating a new dialogue with the audience, which required a search for a new medium that could express what I was looking to define. The material choice I made was as important as the image I drew and the concept it held within that material.



Figure 4; You Can See Me if You Look Close
Acrylic on Muslin

Impact and Resilience

Keeping Something Precious

Graphite on Paper

In a series of erasure drawings I combine the permanent and impermanent nature of my materials. Working with graphite pencil and an eraser I work a drawing over and over. Retracing images from my childhood, I physically render a small child, and then erase her until only a faint image is left. Then I draw her once again and erase her away. Over and over this process makes the smudge left after erasing stronger and stronger until what is left is a likeness to the original drawing with the history of the process evident on the surface of the page. (See Figure 5 and 7) Through the destructive process of erasing the image away I've also made her resilient to further damage. The final drawing can no longer be erased and through this act I've created a history for the small child and have protected her from disappearing or ever being forgotten.



Figure 5



Figure 6: In Bed Detail
Before Erasure

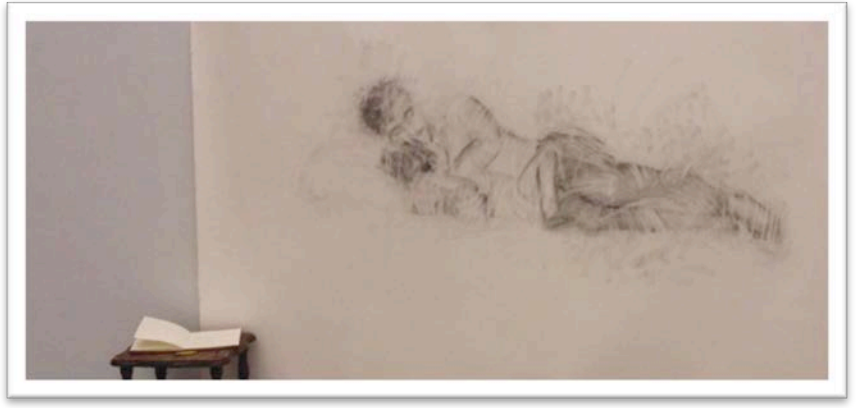


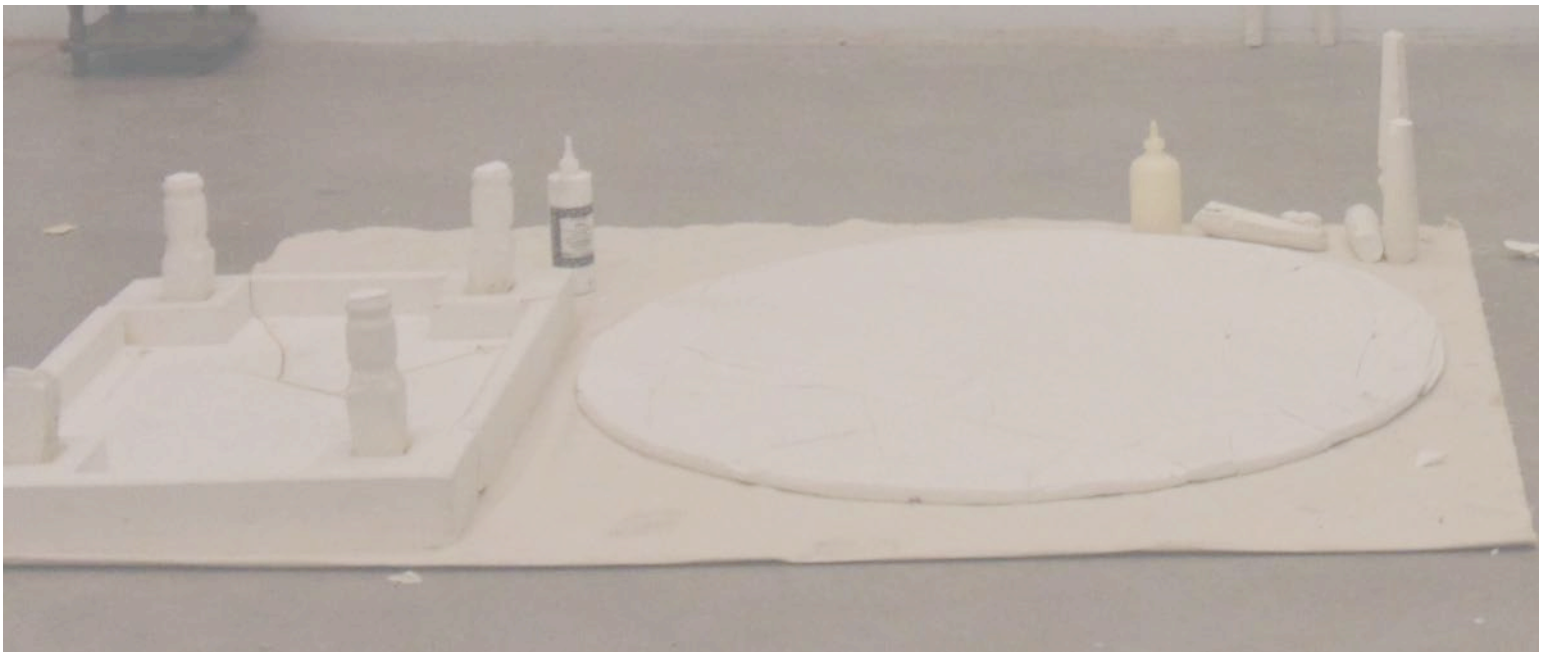
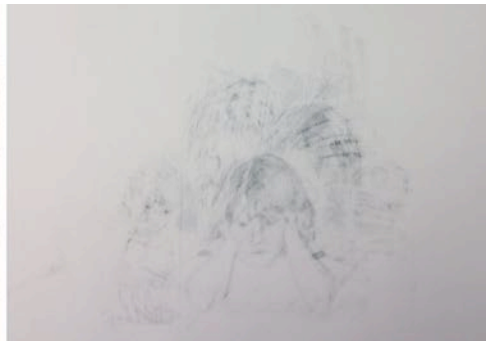
Figure 7; In Bed with My Father
Graphite on Paper

A

A graphite drawing can easily be erased...think of the erased deKooning drawing by Robert Rauschenberg. Technically, though considered archival, it's an impermanent material but I've found a way through my destructive process to make the entire drawing a smudge. (See Figures 6 and 7) It can't be erased. It becomes permanent through the process and thus changes the innate nature of the material itself. I constantly am looking to process as a means of imitating loss or preservation and often both are present in the work. The way that the process informs the content of the work is extremely important to my working process. The process itself becomes just as important as the final product. Time becomes an evident feature of the work because of how the process leaves it's mark on the surface of the drawing.

Trying to Rebuild out of Brokenness

Struggling to Keep a Family Together



Plaster Casts

I am drawn to plaster because it has similar qualities to human life. It's strong but fragile, can seemingly withstand so much but cannot ever be fully repaired when broken, the scars of previous breaks are apparent through cracks and chips that you can try to hide through process but inevitably always remain, and if the break is severe enough it can no longer be repaired. I've been using this material to cast objects from my childhood.

WJT Mitchell describes the process of casting an object; it is synonymous with how I think about sculpture and why it so closely relates to the drawings and paintings that came before my interests in the object. I only use Antony Gormley's name here because the article is about him but it's the way the process is described that I'm interested in rather than the work he is creating. "...it works from within matter, holding open a space within rather than sculpting away material from outside. He [Antony Gormley] procures a kind of three-dimensional photographic impression..."^{iv} This is the three-dimensional translation of what I am doing in my painting and drawing, creating a photographic impression of the memories I've held onto over the years and seeking a change in my current state of mind. I see these two types of making working in the same way and do not think of them separately. I am physically retracing and remaking image and object both two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally. Because I'm dealing with home it makes sense to create furniture that hold the paintings in place. The very objectness of the sculptures I create give life to the paintings and drawings and relate them more

closely to home; they exist in the same thought, the same space. As Heidegger puts it, “things themselves are places and do not merely belong to a place.”^v

I began to think about the objects we are surrounded by everyday and the potential for meaning held within them. The table seemed like the center of what I was trying to do acting as a symbol for family. The table is a communal object with

its main purpose

to bring people

together. I cast

my childhood

dining room table

in plaster that’s

been in my family

for three



Figure 8; Longing to Belong
Installation; Waiting for the Fall

generations. At its foundation it’s meant to create a community, a family holding in place the family members documented in the paintings that surrounds the table.

However, I have created an object that cannot support its own weight. It will eventually cause its own destruction and has. The process of its breakage was out of my control. I could not prevent it and I did not know how long it would stand. I like that the table has it’s own lifespan and that the material is in control of its own destruction. Eventually all things fall apart. Even after the table broke it was still recognized as a table. It can no longer function but it is still seen as a table nonetheless. So even though it appears to be about the destruction of a family, I see it as an acceptance of the dysfunction that most of us live with everyday. It’s the

perfect imperfection in all of us that is important. The family still exists but they no longer can rely on the symbol that was supposed to hold them together. Now they must do the work to come together on their own. They long to belong enough to accept their own fallibility and look on to remember things as they wished they could be, whole again. (See Figure 8 and 9)

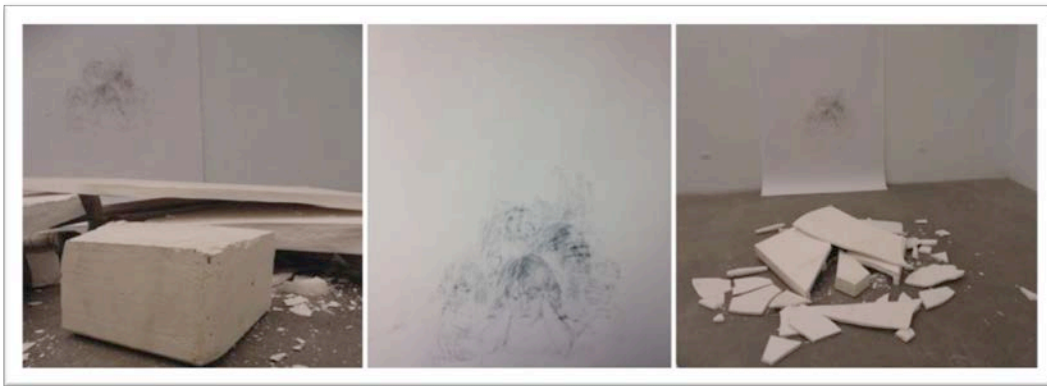


Figure 9; Longing to Belong
Installation; After the Break

It is the lifespan
of the object that
I become
fascinated by. It
holds a
metaphoric death

and it's death itself that embeds meaning in life.^{vi} The object holds more importance knowing that it could only for a short period of time. The object cannot be fully complete until its lifespan ends as if it's waiting for something. It requires that finality to derive its context. While the object is still whole it embraces the potential to hold meaning but feels incomplete. Once the table fell apart everything made more sense. The look on the child's distraught face answered many questions. The broken table then symbolizes that everything comes to an end and also that there is an acceptance of the dysfunction of the object. But in that lifespan something interesting happens as well because even broken its still recognized as a table^{vii} and therefore, though dysfunctional it fully holds the meaning of what it is to be lost without a symbol holding you together as a family.

Longing to Preserve Something Lost

Sensitive Material



Shifting the Process

In my second year of school I had a major shift in my work. I began to take a step back and question the need to have my own image present in the work to speak to the themes in my work. I wondered if I could create a family dynamic without the need for the image of a person and if it could be made more universal yet still personal and better understood to a broader audience. What it lead me to was the series of work *A Delicate Line*. (See Figure 10) A variety of vintage found fabrics are hanging on handmade clothesline braided out of lace, old clothing and bedsheets. Each piece is individually altered in a different way: skimmed or broken plaster casted pieces, water-soluble weathered drawings, and pieces burnt in destruction. They are hung on the wall in a fashion that creates a delicate shadowed line below the installation.



Figure 10
A Delicate Line Series

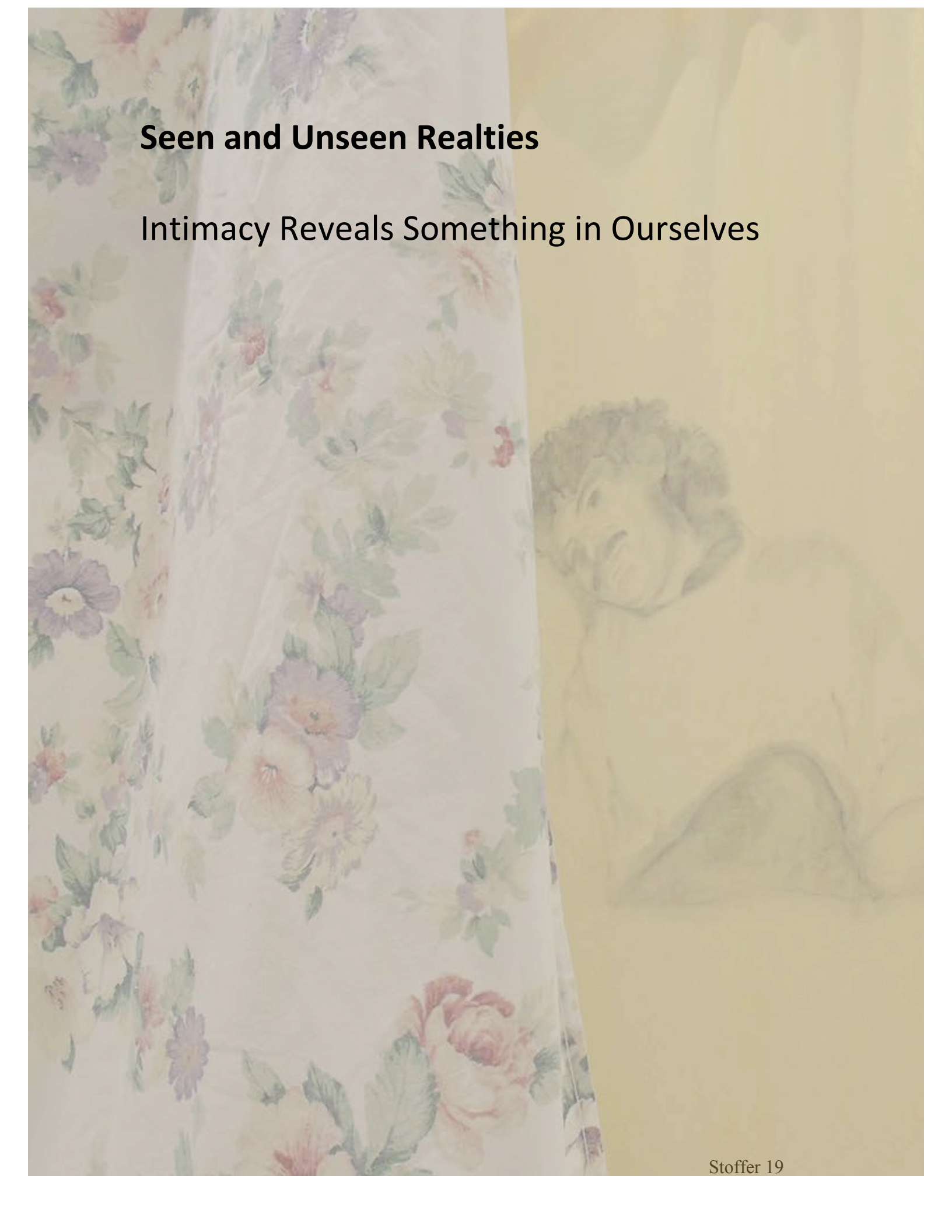
This installation took my work to a different level. I was using materials in a new way, questioning different modes of deterioration that wasn't only seen as violent, and able to capture something I had been seeking, an understanding of loss, not of myself or of my childhood but simply the notion of loss itself. The time span was evident; the decay of the patterns on the vintage fabrics was seen as loss instead of an attack on the childhood image. It freed me to freely experiment with materials again something I had been missing. The idea of

the time spent knowing it will be lost in the end, the weathering process, all of that influences the decisions I made. The echo of pattern after pattern and looking to broaden the conversation about loss further and further led me down a road to create it as a series hung as an installation thinking about each piece as its own entity. This is also similar to the family dynamic, the cluster of individuals, I consider with the other work but in a more universal way.

Permanence and Impermanence

I've been interested in lifespan from the beginning and now had a new avenue to explore how I might create evolution, timespan, and loss. I realized I had been creating objects that have a witness to their change from beginning to end or can imagine that shift even if they only see the final product. I find that an object holds more importance knowing it only lasts for a short period of time. Isn't that why life is so precious? Because our time here is limited and we don't know how much of it we will be given.

For me I like taking on the experiment of finding a way to challenge the idea of permanency, just like in the erasure drawings or the delicate line series, I have found a way to push the boundaries of plaster outside of its usual boundaries. Technically a plaster sculpture would be thought of as a permanent thing except I use plaster in ways that can easily be destroyed. I made a table knowing it would fall apart. I skim fragile objects and hand cast them into the shape I want that just held wrong can destroy them. The toddler-sized dress technically could last forever but only if treated with the delicacy necessary to keep it from falling apart. (See Figure 14)



Seen and Unseen Realities

Intimacy Reveals Something in Ourselves

In both *the Delicate Line Series* and *Along the Lines of Intimacy* I use water-soluble pencils knowing that the drawings will be weathered and could be completely destroyed and gone forever even though I spent a great deal of time on each individual piece. I put in as much care as someone would for a drawing that should last forever and yet I know it's only meant to last for a moment. The fabric won't fall apart but the image will be lost or faded, and left outside long enough the sun could bleach it away completely. The wind was so strong during Installation Nation that one of my handmade clotheslines snapped, on the Public Artwork *Along the Lines of Intimacy*, and the sheets hung on it had to be taken down for the duration of the installation. There is fragility in a lot of what I do which makes the materials ephemeral even if they shouldn't be or aren't typically considered ephemeral in nature. I push them to their breaking point or just before it so that its held in a suspended moment of time on the brink of falling apart, sometimes held in a permanent image of loss and sometimes just waiting for the moment when it can no longer support itself.

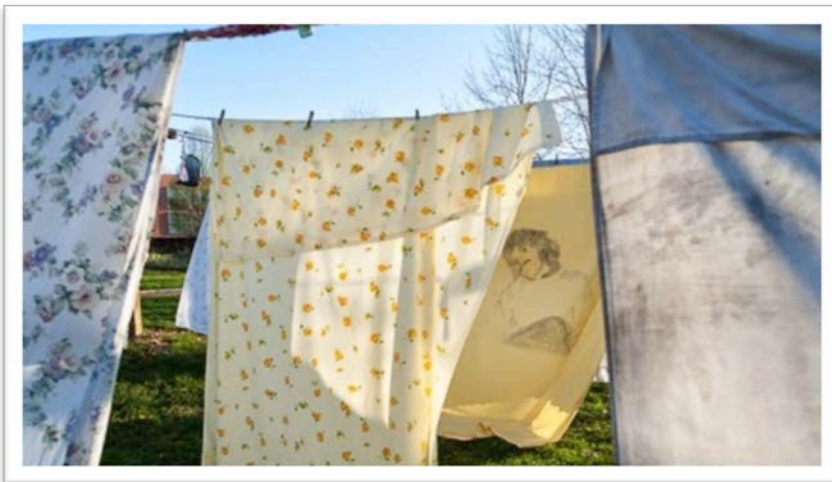


Figure 11
Along the Lines of Intimacy Installation View

This temporary public installation, *Along the Lines of Intimacy*, (See Figure 11) was made mostly by hand, though several colorful vintage sheets were

also included in the installation to add more color and visibility to the piece. The piece measured sixteen feet wide by 25 feet deep and over 6 feet high.

Water-soluble graphite pencils were used to make drawings on vintage bedsheets hung on handmade braided clotheslines, just as the *Delicate Line Series*, but on a much larger scale. The outdoor installation allowed for natural light and shadow to create a dramatic affect while allowing light to pass through the drawings. The installation was large



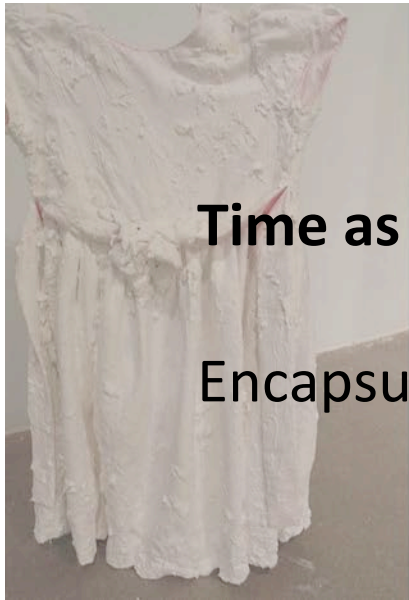
Figure 12
Along the Lines of Intimacy
Interactive View

enough to walk through and be immersed within it. (See figure 12) And on Family day during the opening reception children were drawn to the movement of the piece.

The goal was to allow the natural weathering process to happen. Allowing rain, wind and the sun to affect the piece. (See Figure 13) Due to rain being the main source of change, it made me question whether the audience had to witness the change to understand how time affected a piece of art.



Figure 13
Along the Lines of Intimacy Installation View



Time as a Medium

Encapsulated Moments



Theories in modern physics argue that time doesn't exist in a linear fashion but that the past, present and future coexists and intertwines. With this in mind I believe our past can be questioned, reconsidered and altered by our present conceptions.^{viii} My work explores time as a medium: considering temporality, lifespan, evolution and preservation. I'm interested in using ephemeral materials to encapsulate a moment, holding it in place to preserve something that would be lost otherwise and creating permanency in them even though they shouldn't last. I expose this loss and our need to preserve what we can, and hold on to the preciousness of the time we have that isn't yet gone. Through installations I try to create lifespan allowing the process to show a passage of time, exploring the way we hold on to things that are falling apart around us even time itself. (See figure and 14)

In *A Child Lost* this toddler-sized plaster dress supports itself. It has no substrate to keep it together and is perpetually in a state of fragility. It holds on to a single moment in time holding itself in place, almost left behind in an encapsulated moment.



Figure 14; A Child Lost
Child's Dress Cast in Skimmed Plaster

One Day I Will Be Whole Again

Herron MFA Thesis Exhibition

"He has put a knife on the things that held us
together and we have fallen apart...even now
they have not found the mouth with which to
tell of their suffering" - Things Fall Apart



One Day I Will Be Whole Again

This piece became the culmination of all of the themes I've been conveying with my work and encapsulated a moment in time just as I was looking to express. The walls showed both impact and resilience to fire as well as an exposure to the loss. There were many moments in the wall where the fire began to deteriorate the walls but the overall structure sustained the destructive nature of fire. (See Figure 15)



Figure 15
Charred Wall Detail

The wall also allowed the past moment and the present moment to collide in an interesting way. It felt like time was standing still looking at the burnt walls. It held the moment just before the entire structure would come apart. The table in the room showed an evolution of its lifespan. (See Figure 16) It seemed to have all the pieces necessary to be whole and then broken and there was evidence of it being



Figure 16
Table Detail

pieced back together yet still held in its fragmented state. Even the title itself, *One Day I will be Whole Again*, shares the essence of hope and the rebuilding of this family, of this home back into unity. The family is held together in a moment just outside the room by a single line of shoes, the only thing whole in the

installation. It reminds you that once there was a family inhabiting the room. (See Figure 17)

*"He has put a knife on the things
that held us together and we have
fallen apart...even now they have
not found the mouth with which
to tell of their suffering."*

– *Things Fall Apart*



Figure 17
Shoes Detail

As my final piece in the Herron Gallery I look at the objects it contains, a broken table, two burnt down walls, a family of shoes, a toddler's dress and a strong quote. These are not necessarily things that everyone has witnessed on their own (i.e a family falling apart, a house fire, etc) but the sense that something has been lost and cannot be expressed in words is something we can all relate to in some way. Everyone has experienced loss in some way either personally or trying to be the support of someone who has had a profound loss and recognize our inability or impotence of knowing that nothing can compete with such a loss: no words, no expression of care, no amount of understanding can make up for this loss. This is the shared understanding we can all relate to and I hope, in that, an emotional response comes forth. I do not wish to force a particular response but an understanding that emotion is involved in how we relate to each other and to loss itself.



Figure 18
A Child Lost

There is a lone survivor among the family looking on at the broken state of affairs as if she's staring at the words on the wall encouraging the viewer to look over her shoulder to read them and their impact before entering the space. The fact that this survivor is a child leaves the room haunted in the memory of what's been lost, a family. (See Figure 18) She, like the audience becomes a witness to the loss around her and is invited to grieve with her seeing what state she has been left to face alone.

Final Thoughts



I came across the book Perfect Home, which is a monolith of Do Ho Suh's work. In the book Heidegger is quoted: "Martin Heidegger noted that *buan*, the archaic form of the German word *bauen*, which means "the act of building," meant "to dwell," with the additional meanings of "to be, to exist" as well as "to stay, to reside." Heidegger thus argued that the equation of building and dwelling is inextricably linked to our existence and identity." (160) My work requires both space and time to come together to make an installation. In light of Heidegger linking home back to our being I'd carry this further and claim that my work relates not only to my existence and memory but also to the loss of time itself, exposing the futility of "the moment." To quote George Segal: "I want to incorporate in my sculpture an intensification of my experience with my inner world and with the tangible world around me...I want to evoke emotions. My ultimate objectives are a feeling of revelation and of psychological truth."

I see most everything in the world as temporary especially our lives and choose to explore the temporality of this world through my art. In my paintings that barely exist, my drawings that become imbedded and resilient to destruction through process and in objects that do not last I'm creating a dialogue about permanence and impermanence. I've been interested in lifespan and how by working with materials that are ephemeral in nature I'm creating objects that have a life and death of their own.

ⁱ Johnson, Kylie. Count me the stars. 2008. This poem gives way the notion of forgotten and

ⁱⁱ Nadeau, Janet Families Making Sense of Death. In this text Janet Nadeau coins the term 'cluster of individuals' as families grieve together but separately. For me it defined how I always saw my family unit as a cluster of people with no real connections to each other and as such have used this text as an explanation for this development especially when dealing with loss.

ⁱⁱⁱ Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. Historicity is our own personal history as it relates to our past and the shared past known as history. It gives way to our temporal being and defines our past and present, and ultimately determines our future. Due to our historicity is determined by how we utilize the past to change the future for the better. Understanding how our historicity and our shared history with others intertwines and shifts together allows us to relate to others and change the relationships we have with others as we look ahead together.

^{iv} WJT Mitchell on Gormley (from What Do Pictures Want) Antony Gormley, Phaidon Press Limited, catalog What Sculpture Wants, Placing Antony Gormley. Page 256. Using objects from my childhood and objects that define home create a space with which I can create a dialogue about the three-dimensional and two dimensional elements for a particular installation fit together such as *Longing to Belong*.

^v Heidegger, Martin Art and Space. In this article Heidegger looks mostly to sculpture to define how space and objecthood come together. His notion that things embody space allow for my installations to become spaces themselves embodying the meaning and metaphor held within them.

^{vi} Heidegger, Martin Being and Time. As a temporal being we are constantly aware that there is finality in our lifespan. We look towards to future and ultimately our future is our death and this heavily weighs on our outlook on how we choose to live in the present. Death gives finality to life and only after death can a life be fully examined as a lifespan.

^{vii} Heidegger, Martin Being and Time. Heidegger discusses how an object of use (a hammer, a pair of shoes, a table, a dress) is something we don't consider in our everyday lives. We simply put on our shoes for the necessity of going somewhere. An object can disclose itself to use in several ways and the type of disclosure I am interested in is when an object loses its purpose or use. A broken object becomes objectively present, meaning that it cannot be used and thus we are constantly aware of the object and of its original purpose. Because the table is broken it allows for it to be objectively present strengthening the awareness of the table and the metaphor it holds.

^{viii} Merali, Zeeya Splitting Time from Space. Scientific America. Einstein is the first to question Newtonian physics dealing with the spacetime continuum. "[Newton] declared that time was absolute always moving forward in the background. Einstein argued time itself was its own dimension woven together with space to form a malleable fabric that is distorted by matter." These two different ideas about time are still strongly researched in the field of physics, dealing with entropy, the spacetime continuum, string theory and the expanding universe. If time is infinite can't it be questioned whether time really is a linear progression? Has not everyone experienced the speeding up and slowing down of time in their day to day lives when not watching a clock It is these types of questions that allow for Einstein's ability to question the relativity of this continuum.

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